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DEPARTMENT FOR DRL

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SUBJECT: UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT PROMOTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS
IN MALDIVES

REF: SECSTATE 267453

1. Per Reftel, Mission submits the draft report on
Supporting Human Rights and Democracy in Maldives.

Begin text.

In 2004, Maldives President Gayoom, head of the parliamentary-style government, began a process to strengthen democracy and introduce political reforms. His commitment to reform, however, was questioned when his government appeared to crackdown on outspoken reformists. During 2004 -- the first year of his sixth term -- the President had declared a state of emergency, which suspended certain fundamental rights, in the wake of the August 2004 civil unrest. As a result, his government spent the last three months of the year preparing charges of sedition against several parliamentarians, some who had been held in solitary confinement for over 60 days.

From August to December, U.S. diplomats engaged in discussions with the Maldivian government to encourage the fair treatment of all detainees as well as to gauge the GORM's continuing commitment to reform. Press statements, both from the U.S. Embassy in Sri Lanka and spokesmen for the Department of State, publicly called on the Maldivian government to treat detainees in accord with international standards on human rights. During multiple visits to Maldives throughout this time frame, U.S. officials successfully persuaded the government to allow U.S. access to some of the detainees, including those who had been transferred to house arrest.

In the aftermath of the December, 26, 2004 tsunami which caused devastation on a nation-wide scale, President Gayoom ordered all charges to be dropped against everyone, except for two people, who had been indicted in connection with the August 12-13 civil unrest.

Secretary Powell, stopping in Maldives after President

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Gayoom had announced his commitment to reform in a June 9 speech, praised the Maldivian leader and expressed the U.S. government's belief in the ability of the Maldivian government to create a more open, democratic political process.

The U.S. government has pursued the promotion of human rights in the Maldives in a variety of other tangible actions.

Through U.S.-funded training, Maldivian police officers participated in police investigative and management training classes. The Maldivian Police Department, which became a separate entity from the National Security Service, in September 2004, will be able to utilize such training as it focuses on implementing a community policing model. Upcoming training for police officers will include a human rights segment.

Human rights training is a key component of all U.S.-Maldivian military-to-military programs. The United States has sent Maldivian military officers to professional military education courses in the United States and funded Maldivian attendees at senior service schools.

In December 2003, President Gayoom established the Maldivian Human Rights Commission by presidential decree. The Commission made major strides in addressing human rights complaints throughout the year and took a forefront role in monitoring the treatment of detainees arrested following the August 2004 unrest. The Commission effectively functioned despite the Majlis' failure to pass implementing legislation for the human rights body. In response to the Commission's capacity-building efforts, the U.S. Government sponsored two Commissioners for International Visitors Programs in the U.S. in August-September 2004. To provide further expertise for the Commission, the Embassy received funding to bring several U.S.-based human rights experts to Maldives to enhance the body's ability to address complaints and educate the public on human rights. Mission is now working with the Commission to identify human rights scholars to participate

in this program.

At present, Maldives does not have complex labor laws and does not allow unions to be formed. Within the context of the Government's focus on reform, Maldives plans to strengthen its labor laws. The U.S. Embassy has been awarded grant money to host a labor seminar to bring together Maldivian government and civil society leaders with experts on labor law in the Asian region to aid the government in the redrafting of its laws.

End text.

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